



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Earth Day 2007 – Thirty-seven Years of Progress, but...

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April is Earth Month and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management is asking Rhode Islanders to learn more about the ecological issues we face and to take action to protect the planet.

Climate change, water contamination, water shortages, ground-level ozone, fishkills, trash, litter –these are some of the environmental issues Rhode Island and the country has grappled with recently. Yet, despite these problems, the air is cleaner than it was 30 years ago with fewer and cleaner smokestacks and our rivers don't change color or burn anymore because of chemicals and dyes from industry.

While we've cleaned up many large sources of pollution, today many small amounts of pollution come from things like failing septic systems, run off from mall parking lots, and exhaust from thousands of tail pipes. Taken together, these seemingly small sources of pollution scattered across the state, add up to big environmental problems. And, the solutions lie in the decisions that we all make each day at home, on the road, at work and at play.

History of Earth Day

Earth Day was founded in 1970 by former Governor and Senator of Wisconsin, Gaylord Nelson. The first Earth Day in 1970 rallied over 20 million Americans from around the country and on college campuses to get involved in environmental "teach-ins". This event, which was the largest grassroots mobilization in US history, created what has come to be known as the environmental movement. It was out of this event that came the first environmental legislation - the Clean Air and Clean Water acts.

Since its start in 1970, and Earth Day has served as a yearly catalyst for ongoing environmental education, action and change. Earth Day has been celebrated continuously in Rhode Island since its 20th anniversary in 1990. Every year, DEM and Earth Day Rhode Island organize statewide Earth Day activities that provide an opportunity to learn more about how the choices we make affect the environment and what we can do to protect our planet and ourselves.

The old adage - Think Globally, Act Locally – is a principle that many Rhode Islanders will follow this Earth Day by rolling up their sleeves to clean up their neighborhoods. John Brown Francis Elementary School has been doing Earth Day clean ups for 5 or 6 years, led by parent Amy Prado. Each year students grab 30 gallon paper trash bags supplied by Earth Day Rhode Island and clean up the area around their schoolyard. They join thousands of other Rhode Islanders who will participate in more than 75 clean ups throughout the state.

It's just one example of how people can get involved. There are many others, such as volunteering with local watershed groups, environmental organizations or conservation commissions year round. Most importantly, however, DEM and Earth Day Rhode Island encourage folks to take steps in their everyday lives to protect the planet. Simple things like turning off unused lights, turning off the water when you brush your teeth and recycling and properly disposing of your trash.

Earth Month will culminate with the Earth Day Family Festival at Warwick Mall on Saturday, April 21 where you can learn more about protecting the planet and your health from more than 30 environmental organizations.

More information can be found at the Earth Day website: www.earthdayri.org

Interview:

- Terri Bisson, DEM Programming Services Officer
- Amy Prado, John Francis Brown PTA



Students from John Brown Francis Elementary School in Warwick participate in one of the many Earth Day clean ups in Rhode Island.